

Nikita Khrushchev

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Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev (Russian: , *Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchov*; IPA: [nʲɪˈkʲitə sʲɪˈrɡʲejɐvʲɪtɕ xruˈʃɐˈɕʲɪn], in English, [ˈkrʊʃˈtʃɛv], [ˈkrʊstʃɛv], [ˈkrʊstʃɒf] or [krʊsˈtʃɒf], occasionally [ˈkrʊʃɒf]; surname more accurately romanized as **Khrushchyyov**^[1]) (April 17 [O.S. April 5] 1894^[2] – September 11, 1971); served as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964, following the death of Joseph Stalin, and Chairman of the Council of Ministers from 1958 to 1964. Khrushchev's party colleagues removed him from power in 1964, replacing him with Leonid Brezhnev. He spent the last seven years of his life under the close supervision of the KGB.

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Early years

Khrushchev was born in the village of Kalinovka, Dmitriyev Uyezd, Kursk Guberniya, Russian Empire, now occupied by the present-day Kursk Oblast in Russia. His father was the peasant Sergei Nikanorovich Khrushchev (Died 1938 of tuberculosis); his mother was Aksinia Ivanovna Khrushcheva. He had a sister two years his junior, Irina. In 1908, his family moved to Yuzovka. Later, since he spent much time working in Ukraine, Khrushchev gave the impression of being Ukrainian. He supported this image by wearing Ukrainian national shirts. However, he said "I Myself Am Russian".^[2]

(<http://anonymouse.org/cgi-bin/anon-www.cgi/http://www.ukrweekly.com/Archive/1960/1796010.shtml>)

Although he was apparently highly intelligent, he only received about two years of education as a child and probably only became fully literate in his late twenties or early thirties.



An early photograph of Khrushchev

He trained and worked as a joiner in various factories and mines. Khrushchev became involved in trade union activities in World War I and, after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, he fought in the Red Army. He became a Party member in 1918 and worked at various management and Party positions in Donbass and Kiev.

In 1931, the government transferred Khrushchev to Moscow. He became the 1st Secretary of the Moscow City Committee (Moscow Gorkom) of VKP(b) in 1935. The Moscow city secretaryship was a traditional proving ground for rising stars in the party (cf Boris Yeltsin) and Khrushchev apparently impressed with his leadership of the Moscow Metro works. In 1938, he became the 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine, one of the most senior regional party positions. Khrushchev became a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow in 1934 and the Politburo in 1939.^[3]

Nikita Khrushchev

Никита Сергеевич Хрущёв



First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

In office

September 7, 1953 – October 14, 1964

Preceded by Joseph Stalin

Succeeded by Leonid Brezhnev

Premier of the Soviet Union

In office

March 27, 1958 – October 14, 1964

Preceded by Nikolai Bulganin

Succeeded by Alexey Kosygin

Born	April 17, 1894 <div>Kalinovka, Russian Empire</div>
Died	September 11, 1971 (aged 77) <div>Moscow, USSR</div>
Nationality	Russian
Political party	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
Spouse	Yefrosinia Khrushcheva (desc.) <div>Marusia Khrushcheva (div.)</div> <div>Nina Khrushcheva</div>



May Day Parade, Moscow, 1937. Left to right Khrushchev, G. Dimitrov, Stalin, V. M. Molotov and A. I. Mikoyan.

Great Patriotic War



Khrushchev (left) at the military council of Stalingrad Front.

During the Great Patriotic War (i.e., the Eastern Front of World War II), Khrushchev served as a political commissar (*zampolit*) with the equivalent rank of Lieutenant General.

In the months following the German invasion, in 1941, Khrushchev, as a local party leader, coordinated the defense of Ukraine, but was dismissed and recalled to Moscow after surrendering Kiev. Later, he was a political commissar at the Battle of Stalingrad and was the senior political officer in the south of the Soviet Union throughout the wartime period - at Kursk, entering Kiev on liberation, and in the suppression of the Bandera nationalists of the Ukrainian Nationalist Organisation, who had earlier allied with the Nazis before fighting them in Western Ukraine.

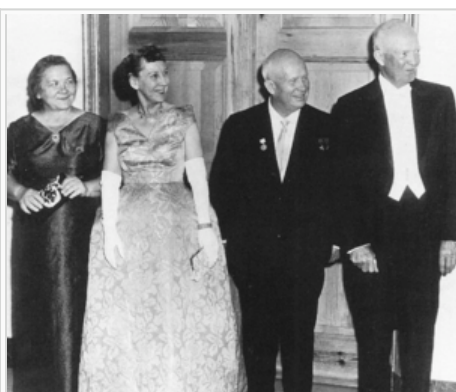
In the years leading up to 1953, Khrushchev carried out Stalin's orders with uncritical obedience, earning the nickname "the Butcher of the Ukraine" in the late 1940s.^[4]

Rise to power

After Joseph Stalin's death on March 5, 1953 there was a power struggle between different factions within the party. Initially Lavrenty Beria controlled much of the political realm by merging the Ministry of Internal Affairs and State security. Fearing that Beria would eventually kill them, Georgy Malenkov, Lazar Kaganovich, Vyacheslav Molotov, Nikolai Bulganin and others united under Khrushchev to denounce Beria and remove him from power. With Beria imprisoned awaiting execution (which followed in December), Malenkov was the heir apparent. Khrushchev was not nearly as powerful as he would eventually become even after his promotion. Becoming party leader on September 7 of that year, and eventually rising above his rivals, Khrushchev's leadership marked a crucial transition for the Soviet Union. He pursued a course of reform and shocked delegates to the 20th Party Congress on 25 February 1956 by making his famous Secret Speech denouncing the "cult of personality" that surrounded Stalin, though he himself played no small part in cultivating it, and accusing Stalin of crimes committed during the Great Purges. This effectively alienated Khrushchev from the more conservative elements of the Party, but he managed to defeat what he termed the Anti-Party Group after they failed in a bid to oust him from the party leadership in 1957.



Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev during the Great Patriotic War



Dwight Eisenhower, Nikita Khrushchev and their wives in 1959

In 1958, Khrushchev replaced Bulganin as prime minister and established himself as the undisputed leader of both state and party. He became Premier of the Soviet Union on March 27, 1958. Khrushchev promoted reform of the Soviet system and began to place an emphasis on the production of consumer goods rather than on heavy industry.

He sought to lower the burden of defense spending on the Soviet economy by placing a new emphasis on rocket based defense. The Soviet lead in this technology was emphasized by the success of Sputnik 1 and subsequently Yuri Gagarin's Vostok flight. However, real Soviet missile forces remained small and the price that Khrushchev paid inside the Soviet system - hostility from the armed forces - was a major contribution to his eventual removal from office.^[5]

At the same time the fear of Soviet missile forces was real enough in the West - prompting then United States of America Senator John F. Kennedy to attack then United States of America Vice-President Richard Nixon over the missile gap in the 1960 U.S. presidential election and culminating in the stand off of the Cuban missile crisis.

Domestically, Khrushchev did not seek to roll back the collectivization of agriculture. Instead he promoted the Virgin Lands Campaign program, saying the Soviet Union could meet and surpass Western agricultural production through the application of modern techniques and the use of new crops. Initial successes here rapidly turned sour.

In 1959, during Richard Nixon's visit to the Soviet Union, Khrushchev took part in what later became known as the Kitchen Debate. Khrushchev reciprocated the visit that September, spending thirteen days in the United States. On his visit Khrushchev had two requests: to visit Disneyland and to meet John Wayne, Hollywood's top box-office draw. Due to the Cold War tension and security concerns, Disneyland officials famously refused entry to Khrushchev.

On his California visit, the Soviet leader got a show of American consumerism and the American way of life. This marked the first time a Soviet leader set foot on U.S. soil. But he was annoyed that the main event of his first day was a lunch with 300 movie stars and other celebrities and a visit to the set of the movie "Can-Can" at 20th Century Fox in Los Angeles, rather than an inspection of an aerospace plant.

After Khrushchev left the studio, gawkers pasted tomatoes on his limo as the doubly offended leader and his 30-car, heavily guarded caravan made its way through city streets. Local authorities would later report that a bomb was planted in a tree along the route and that a man who said he was deer hunting was arrested on suspicion of carrying concealed weapons just moments before Khrushchev's motorcade passed by a Los Angeles street.



Khrushchev and Mao 1957

Khrushchev declared himself outraged at missing Mickey Mouse on his American trip and offended by the chilly reception. The Kremlin boss' new attitude towards the West as a rival instead of as an evil entity alienated Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China. The Soviet Union and the PRC, too, would later be involved in a similar "cold war" triggered by the Sino-Soviet Split in 1960.

In 1961, Khrushchev approved plans proposed by East German leader Walter Ulbricht to build the Berlin Wall, thereby reinforcing the Cold War division of Germany and Europe as a whole.

Khrushchev's personality

Khrushchev was regarded by his political enemies in the Soviet Union as boorish. He had a reputation for interrupting speakers to insult them. The Politburo accused him once of 'hare-brained scheming' — referring to his erratic policies. He regularly humiliated the Soviet *nomenklatura*, or ruling elite, with his gaffes. He once branded Mao, who was at odds with Khrushchev ever since the denunciation of Stalin at the 1956 Congress, an "old galosh", which was translated as "old boot". In Mandarin, the word "boot" is used to describe a prostitute or immoral woman. The Soviet leader also famously condemned his Bulgarian counterpart, making xenophobic comments about the Bulgarian people as well.

Khrushchev's blunders were partially the result of his limited formal education. Although intelligent, as even his political enemies admitted after he had defeated them, and certainly cunning, he lacked knowledge and understanding of the world outside of his direct experience and often proved easy to manipulate by hucksters who knew how to appeal to his vanity and prejudices. For example, he was a supporter of Trofim Lysenko even after the Stalin years and became convinced that the Soviet Union's agricultural crises could be solved through the planting of maize on the same scale as the United States, failing to realize that the differences in climate and soil made this inadvisable.

Khrushchev repeatedly disrupted the proceedings in the United Nations General Assembly in September-October 1960 by pounding his fists on the desk and shouting in Russian. On 29 September 1960, Khrushchev twice interrupted a speech by British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan.

The unflappable Macmillan famously commented over his shoulder to Frederick Boland, the Assembly President (Ireland), that if Mr Khrushchev wished to continue, he would like a translation.^{[6][7]}

The notorious shoe-banging incident occurred during a debate, on October 12, over a Russian resolution decrying colonialism. Khrushchev was infuriated by a statement from the rostrum by Lorenzo Sumulong which charged the Soviets with employing a double standard, pointing to their domination of Eastern Europe as an example of the very type of colonialism their resolution criticized. According to newspaper reports, published the following day, Mr. Khrushchev thereupon pulled off his right shoe, stood up, brandishing it at the Philippine delegate on the other side of the hall and began to furiously bang the shoe on his desk. The enraged Khrushchev accused Mr. Sumulong of being "Холуй и ставленник империализма" (*Kholuy i stavlennik imperializma*), which was translated as "a jerk, a stooge and a lackey of imperialism". The Premier alternately shouted, waved a brawny right arm, shook his finger and removed his shoe a second time. The second shoe incident occurred during a speech by Francis O. Wilcox, an Assistant U.S. Secretary of State. The chaotic scene finally ended when General Assembly President Frederick Boland broke his gavel calling the meeting to order, but not before the image of Khrushchev as a hotheaded buffoon was indelibly etched into the collective memory of the international community. Another observer said that while Khrushchev was banging a shoe on the table, he had shoes on both feet, which would imply that he had brought a third shoe for the gesture, having staged and planned the demonstration in advance.



Khrushchev and Yuri Gagarin



Khrushchev and Harold Macmillan in Moscow in 1959

On another occasion, Khrushchev said in reference to capitalism, "Мы вас похороним!" (*My vas pokhoronim!*), translated to "We will bury you". This phrase, ambiguous both in the English language and in the Russian language, was interpreted in several ways. Later, he would refer back to the comment and state, "I once got in trouble for saying, 'We will bury you'. Of course, we will not bury you with a shovel. Your own working class will bury you". Of course, on the metaphorical level, the statement could be read two ways. One way is: 'We will kill you, then bury you.' The other way is: 'You will die, and we be at your funeral.', 'We will outlive you.'



May Day Parade 1957. *Left to right* Zhukov, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Kaganovich, Malenkov, Molotov and Mikoyan

Forced retirement

Khrushchev's downfall came as a result of a conspiracy among the Party bosses, irritated by his erratic policies and cantankerous behavior, which was seen by the Party as an embarrassment on the international stage. The Communist Party accused Khrushchev of making political mistakes, such as mishandling the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the cold war with China^[8] and disorganizing the Soviet economy, especially in the agricultural sector.^{[9][10]}

The conspirators, led by Leonid Brezhnev, Aleksandr Shelepin and the KGB chief Vladimir Semichastny, struck in October 1964, when Khrushchev was on vacation in Pitsunda, Abkhazia. They called a special meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee and, when Khrushchev arrived on 13 October, voted to remove him from his positions in the Party and in the Soviet government. A special meeting of the Central Committee was hastily convened the next day and approved the decisions of the Presidium without debate. On 15 October 1964, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet accepted Khrushchev's resignation as the Premier of the Soviet Union.^[11]

Following his ousting, Khrushchev spent the rest of his life as a pensioner, living in quiet retirement in Moscow. He remained a member of the Central Committee until 1966. For the rest of his life, he was closely watched by the KGB, but managed to dictate his memoirs and smuggle them to the West.^[12] He died of a heart attack at a hospital near his home in Moscow on 11 September 1971 and is buried in the Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow, having been denied a state funeral and interment in the Kremlin wall.



Khrushchev's private photo

Key political actions

- In his Secret Speech, Khrushchev denounced Stalin for his personality cult and his regime for "violation of Leninist norms of legality", marking the onset of the Khrushchev Thaw.
- Dissolved the Cominform organization and reconciled with Josip Broz Tito, which ended the Informbiro period in the history of Yugoslavia.
- Established the Warsaw Pact in 1955 in response to the formation of NATO.
- Ordered the 1956 Soviet military intervention in Hungary (*see* Hungarian Revolution of 1956).
- Ceded Crimea from the Russian SFSR to the Ukrainian SSR in 1955.
- Provided support for Egypt against the West during the 1956 Suez Crisis.
- Promoted the doctrine of "Peaceful co-existence" in the foreign policy, accompanied by the slogan "To catch up and overtake the West" in internal policy.
- Triggered the Sino-Soviet Split through talks with the U.S. and a refusal to support the Chinese nuclear program.
- Initiated the Soviet space program that launched Sputnik I and Yuri Gagarin, getting a head start in the space race. Participated in negotiations with U.S. President John F. Kennedy for a joint moon program, negotiations that ended when Kennedy was assassinated in 1963.
- Canceled a summit meeting over the Gary Powers U-2 incident.
- Met with U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower at Camp David, Maryland in September 1959. He was the first Russian leader to visit the United States in a diplomatic capacity.
- Initiated the deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba, which led to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.
- Approved East Germany's construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, after the West did not agree to his proposal to incorporate West Berlin into a neutral, demilitarized "free city".



Khrushchev and Tito, 1955



Khrushchev and Castro, 1960



Khrushchev embracing Cuban President Fidel Castro



Khrushchev meeting U.S. president John F. Kennedy in 1961

Key economic actions

- Second wave of the reclamation of virgin and abandoned lands (*see* Virgin Lands Campaign).
- Introduction of sovnarkhozes, (Councils of People's Economy), regional organizations, in an attempt to combat the centralization and departmentalism of the ministries
- Reorganization of agriculture, with preference given to sovkhozes (state farms), including conversion of kolkhozes into sovkhozes, introduction of maize (earning him the sobriquet *kukuruznik*, "the maize enthusiast").
- Coping with housing crisis by quickly building millions of apartments according to simplified floor plans, dubbed khrushchovkas.
- Created a minimum wage in 1956.
- Redenomination of the ruble 10:1 in 1961.

Legacy

On the positive side, he was admired for his efficiency and for maintaining an economy which, during the 1950s and 1960s, had growth rates higher than most Western countries, contrasted with the stagnation beginning with his successors. He is renowned for his liberalisation policies, whose results began with the widespread exoneration of political sentences.



Khrushchev in Yugoslavia, 1963

With Khrushchev's amnesty program, former political prisoners and their surviving relatives could now live a normal life without the infamous "wolf ticket".

Khrushchev placed more emphasis on the production of consumer goods and housing instead of heavy industry, precipitating a rapid rise in living standards.

The arts benefited from this environment of liberalisation, where works like Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* created an attitude of dissent that would escalate during the subsequent Brezhnev-Kosygin era.

His de-Stalinization had a huge impact on young Communists of the day. Khrushchev encouraged more liberal communist leaders to replace hard-line Stalinists throughout the Eastern bloc. Alexander Dubček, who became the leader of Czechoslovakia in January 1968, accelerated the process of liberalisation in his own country with his Prague Spring program. Mikhail Gorbachev, who became the Soviet Union's leader in 1985, was inspired by it and it became evident with his policies of glasnost and perestroika. Khrushchev is sometimes cited as "the last great reformer" among Soviet leaders before Gorbachev.

On the negative side, he was criticized for his ruthless crackdown of the 1956 revolution in Hungary, even though he and Zhukov were pushing against intervention until Hungary's declaration of withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. He encouraged the East German authorities to set up the notorious Berlin Wall in August 1961. He had very poor diplomatic skills, giving him the reputation of being a rude, uncivilized peasant in the West and as an irresponsible clown in his own country. He renewed persecutions against the Russian Orthodox Church, publicly promising to show the "last priest" on Soviet television. Between 1960 and 1962, as many as 30 percent of churches were destroyed, with the number of monasteries falling by a quarter.^[13]

His administration, although efficient, was also known to be erratic since he disbanded a large number of Stalinist-era agencies. He took a dangerous gamble in 1962 over Cuba, which almost made a Third World War inevitable. Agriculture barely kept up with population growth, as bad harvests mixed with good ones, culminating in a disastrous harvest in 1963, due to weather. All this damaged his prestige after 1962 and was enough for the Central Committee, Khrushchev's critical base of support, to take action against him. His right-hand man, Leonid Brezhnev, led the bloodless coup.

Many dissidents tended to view the Khrushchev era with nostalgia as his successors began discrediting or backtracking on his liberal reforms.

Personal life

Khrushchev married Yefrosinia Pisareva (1896-1921) in 1914. A year later their daughter Yulia (d. 1981) was born, and they had a son, Leonid, three days after the October Revolution. Yefrosinia died in 1921 of hunger, exhaustion, and typhus during the famine following the Russian Civil War. In 1922 Khrushchev married a girl of 17 named Marusia but, as she attended to her young daughter and neglected her stepchildren, Khrushchev's mother soon persuaded him to leave her.^[14] His third wife was Nina Petrovna Kukharchuk (1900-1984), with whom he began living soon afterward (though the marriage was not officially registered until the late 1960s);^[14] besides Sergei, they had two daughters, Rada (born 1929) and Lena (1937-1972).

Khrushchev's eldest son Leonid died in 1943 during the Great Patriotic War. His younger son Sergei emigrated to the United States and is now an American citizen and a Professor at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies. He often speaks to American audiences to share his memories of the "other" side of the Cold War.

Further reading



Khrushchev's grave at the Novodevichy Cemetery as it was in 1973, two years after his death. Khrushchev's remains lie at a right-angle to the present memorial.



Khrushchev's grave (as it looks now) was designed by Ernst Neizvestny in 1974 [1] (<http://anonymouse.org/cgi-bin/anon-www.cgi/>), a sculptor he had denounced for promoting "degenerate art". It was made out of black and white stone perhaps to suggest that Khrushchev was both a good and a bad ruler, but to some it represents Khrushchev's central role in the Cold War between the East and the West.

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- Tompson, William J. *Khrushchev: A Political Life*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995



Khrushchev in Hungary 1964 shortly before his ousting.

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- ¹ [^] Due to various Reforms of Russian orthography, the *ѣ* letter is often replaced by *e* in writing. Hence *Khrushchev* is the standard English transliteration, even though it is more closely rendered as *Khrushchyov*.
- ² [^] According to official Soviet sources and his memoirs. His birth certificate gives 3/15 April. Tompson, p. 2.
- ³ [^] Taubman, William; Sergei Khrushchev and Abbott Gleason (2000). *Nikita Khrushchev*, 16.
- ⁴ [^] Pearson, Raymond (2002). *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*, 55.
- ⁵ [^] *The Soviet paradox: external expansion, internal decline*. Seweryn Bialer Published 1986, I.B.Tauris, ISBN 1850430306
- ⁶ [^] BBC News, 28 October 2002, When the diplomatic mask slips (http://anonymouse.org/cgi-bin/anon-www.cgi/http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2368397.stm)
- ⁷ [^] Hamilton, Thomas J. (1960-09-30), "Macmillan in U.N. Appeal; Khrushchev Shouts Protest", *New York Times*, <<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F20912FE3C551A7A93C2AA1782D85F448685F9>>
- ⁸ [^] Edward Crankshaw: *The New Cold War; Moscow vs. Peking*, London< 1963
- ⁹ [^] Harry Schwarz:- *The Soviet Economy since Stalin*, London 1965
- ¹⁰ [^] *Pravda*, April 5 1963, speech by Voronov
- ¹¹ [^] Edward Crankshaw:- "Khrushchev", London; Collins; 1966
- ¹² [^] "Khrushchev Remembers" Little Brown & Company (January 1970) ISBN-10: 0316831409 ISBN-13: 978-0316831406
- ¹³ [^] Kulavig, Erik, *Dissent in the years of Khrushchev*, p. 39. Palgrave, London, 2003.
- ¹⁴ [^] ^a ^b Taubman, William, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, p. 58. W. W. Norton, New York, 2003.

External links

- Obituary, *The New York Times*, September 12, 1971, *Khrushchev's Human Dimensions Brought Him to Power and to His Downfall* (<http://anonymouse.org/cgi-bin/anon-www.cgi/http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0417.html>)
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- A "Stalinist" rebuttal of Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" from the CPUSA, 1956 (<http://anonymouse.org/cgi-bin/anon-www.cgi/http://www.mltranslations.org/US/TP/tp2.htm>)
- *Serye volki* (1993) (<http://anonymouse.org/cgi-bin/anon-www.cgi/http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108085/>) , Film chronicles the plot to expel Nikita Khrushchev from his post of CPSU Secretary General
- "Tumultuous, prolonged applause ending in ovation. All rise." Khrushchev's "Secret Report" and Poland (http://anonymouse.org/cgi-bin/anon-www.cgi/http://www.threemonkeyonline.com/article_khrushchev_stalin_cult_individual.htm)

Preceded by Joseph Stalin	First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 1953–1964	Succeeded by Leonid Brezhnev
Preceded by Nikolai Bulganin	Chairman of the Council of Ministers 1958–1964	Succeeded by Alexey Kosygin
Preceded by Hungarian Freedom Fighter	Time's Man of the Year 1957	Succeeded by Charles De Gaulle

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